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Prepn. of chitosan salt of absorptive properties e.g. for diapers - comprises recovery of chitosan salt from mixt. of mono- and multi-basic acid(s), water and water-insoluble chitosan and opt. heat treating

Patent Number: GB2296250

International patents classification: A61L-000/00 A61L-015/60 C08B-000/00 C08B-037/08 A61F-000/00 B01J-000/00 A61L-015/28 A61L-015/42

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GB2296250 A Prepn. of a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt (I), having an initial Absorbency under Load (AUL) value 14 g/g, comprises: (i) formation of a mixt. of pH 2-6.5, of (a) water-insoluble chitosan, (b) water and (c) an acid from mono- and multibasic acids of pKa, below 6, all pKan being more than 5.5 and n being an integer more than 1; and (ii) recovery of (I). Opt. (1) after recovery of the water-soluble chitosan salt, treatment under humid conditions or at a temp. and for a period follows to obtain (I); or (2) the recovered chitosan salt comprises an amt. of the original crystalline structure to give (I). Also claimed is (I) described. USE - (I) is suitable for personal care prods., e.g. diapers, training pants, adult incontinence prods. and feminine care prods. ADVANTAGE - Natural based (I) has absorptive properties similar to synthetic, highly absorptive materials. (Dwg. 1/1) GB2296250 B A water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt wherein the chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least

about 14 grams per gram. (Dwg.1)

 Publication data: Patent Family: GB2296250 A 19960626 DW1996-29 C08B-037/08 49p * AP: 1995GB-0026240 19951221 WO9620015 A2 19960704 DW1996-32 A61L-000/00 Eng 52p AP: 1995WO-US16191 19951214 DSNW: AM AT AU BB BG BR BY CA CH CN CZ DE DK EE ES FI GB GE HU IS JP KE KG KP KR KZ LK LR LT LU LV MD MG MN MW MX NO NZ PL PT RO RU SD SE SG SI SK TJ TM TT UA UG UZ VN DSRW: AT BE CH DE DK ES FR GB GR IE IT KE LS LU MC MW NL OA PT SD SE SZ UG

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WO9620015 A3 19960906 DW1996-45 C08B-037/08 AP:

1995WO-US16191 19951214 AU9645167 A 19960719 DW1996-47 A61L-015/60 FD: Based

on WO9620015 AP: 1996AU-0045167 19951214

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EP-799247 A1 19971008 DW1997-45 C08B-037/08 Eng FD: Based on WO9620015 AP: 1995EP-0943779 19951214; 1995WO-US16191 19951214 DSR: DE FR GB IT

TW-323286 A 19971221 DW1998-15 C08B-037/08 AP: 1995TW-0113624 19951220

AU-689692 B 19980402 DW1998-23 A61L-015/60 FD: Previous Publ. AU9645167; Based on WO9620015 AP: 1996AU-

0045167 19951214 JP10511720 W 19981110 DW1999-04 C08B-037/08 53p FD: Based on WO9620015 AP: 1995WO-US16191 19951214; 1996JP-

0520480 19951214 KR98700880 A 19980430 DW1999-14 A61L-015/28 FD: Based

on WO9620015 AP: 1995WO-US16191 19951214; 1997KR-0704277 19970621

MX9704660 Al 20000701 DW2001-34 A61L-000/00 AP: 1997MX-0004660 19970620

Priority nº: 1994US-0362395 19941222

Covered countries: 67 Publications count: 14

Cited patents: EP-627225 (Cat. X); JP01182302 (Cat. X); No-

SR.Pub; 2.Jnl.Ref

 Accession codes : Accession No: 1996-280184 [29] Sec. Acc. nº CPI : C1996-088887

 Derwent codes : Manual code: CPI: A03-A A09-A08 A12-V03A D09-C02 D09-C03 D09-C04 D09-C04D D09-C05 D09-C06 F04-C01 F04-E04 Derwent Classes: All A96 D22 F07

· Update codes: Basic update code: 1996-29 Equiv. update code:1996-32; 1996-33; 1996-39; 1997-39; 1997-45; 1998-15; 1998-23; 1999-04; 1999-14; 2001-34

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Others: UE4

2001-06

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PCT

WORLD INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY ORGANIZATION International Bureau



INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 6:	- 1	(11) International Publication Number:	WO 96/20015
A61L A	12	(43) International Publication Date:	4 July 1996 (04.07.96)

(21) International Application Number: PC

PCT/US95/16191

(22) International Filing Date:

14 December 1995 (14.12.95)

(30) Priority Data:

08/362,395

22 December 1994 (22.12.94) US

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(81) Designated States: AM, AT, AU, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GB, GE, HU, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LK, LR, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, TJ, TM, TT, UA, UG, UZ, VN, ARIPO patent (KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG), European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

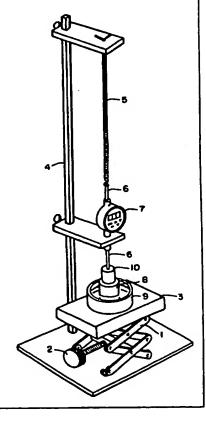
Published

Without international search report and to be republished upon receipt of that report.

(54) Title: CHITOSAN SALTS AND PROCESS FOR THE PREPARATION THEREOF

(57) Abstract

Disclosed is a method for producing a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt having improved absorption properties. The method involves forming a mixture of a chitosan, water, an acid, and, optionally, a crosslinking agent, recovering the formed chitosan salt from the mixture and, optionally, treating said recovered chitosan salt with heat or under humid conditions.



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CHITOSAN SALTS AND PROCESS FOR THE PREPARATION THEREOF

The present invention relates to chitosan salts having improved absorbent properties.

The use of water-swellable, generally water-insoluble absorbent materials, commonly known as superabsorbents, in disposable Such absorbent absorbent personal care products is known. materials are generally employed in absorbent products such as diapers, training pants, adult incontinence products, feminine care products in order to increase the absorbent capacity of such products while reducing their overall bulk. Such absorbent materials are generally present in absorbent products in a fibrous matrix, such as a matrix of wood pulp A matrix of wood pulp fluff generally has an absorbent capacity of about 6 grams of liquid per gram of fluff. absorbent materials described above generally have an absorbent capacity of at least about 10, preferably of about 20, and often 100 times their weight in water. incorporation of such absorbent materials in personal care products can reduce the overall bulk while increasing the absorbent capacity of such products.

A wide variety of materials has been described for use as 25 absorbent materials in such personal care products. materials include natural-based materials such as agar, pectin, gums, carboxyalkyl starch, and carboxyalkyl cellulose, as well as synthetic materials such as polyacrylates, polyacrylamides, and hydrolyzed polyacrylonitrile. While the natural-based 30 absorbent materials are known for use in personal care products, they have not gained wide usage in such products. natural-based absorbent materials have not gained wide usage in personal care products, at least in part, because their absorbent properties are generally inferior compared to the 35 synthetic absorbent materials, such as the polyacrylates. Sp cifically, many of the natural-based materials tend to form s ft, g latinous masses when swollen with a liquid. When employ d in absorbent products, the pres nc f such soft gelatinous masses tends to prevent the transport of liquid within the fibrous matrix in which the absorbent materials are incorporated. This phenomenon is known as gel-blocking. Once gel-blocking occurs, subsequent insults of liquid cannot be efficiently absorbed by the product, and the product tends t leak. Further, many of the natural-based materials exhibit poor absorption properties, particularly when subjected to external pressures.

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Chitosan, a deacetylated chitin, is a cation-active, polyprimary amine with diverse applications in fields such as dispersing agents, adhesives, pesticides, waste water treatment, food processing, and wound healing.

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Unfortunately, the known modified chitosan materials generally do not possess absorptive properties comparable to many of the synthetic, highly-absorptive materials. This has prevented widespread use of such chitosan materials in absorbent personal care products.

In contrast, the synthetic absorbent materials are often capable of absorbing large quantities of liquid while maintaining a generally stiff, non-mucilaginous character. Accordingly, the synthetic absorbent materials can be incorporated in absorbent products while minimizing the likelihood of gel-blocking.

It is therefore desirable to develop and produce a natural-based, highly absorbent chitosan material having absorptive properties similar to the synthetic, highly absorptive materials and, thus, suitable for use in personal care absorbent products.

According to the invention, a process is therefore provided f r preparing a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt according to independent claim 1 and a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt according to independent claims 34 and 47.

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Further advantageous features, aspects and details of the invention are evident from the dependent claims, the description and the drawing. The claims are intended to be understood as a first, non-limiting approach to defining the invention in general terms.

The present invention relates to chitosan salts having improved absorbent properties. Specifically, the present invention relates to chitosan salts having an improved ability to absorb liquid while under an external pressure and a process for the preparation thereof.

Disclosed is a method for producing a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt having absorption improved properties. The method involves forming a mixture of a chitosan, water, an acid, and, optionally, a crosslinking agent, recovering the formed chitosan salt from the mixture and, optionally, treating said recovered chitosan salt with heat or under humid conditions.

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In one aspect, the present invention concerns a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt. The chitosan salt is characterized in that it exhibits an effective initial Absorbency Under Load (AUL) value.

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One embodiment of the present invention concerns a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt that exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

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In another aspect, the present invention further concerns a process for preparing a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt that exhibits an effective initial Absorbency Under Load value.

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One process of the pres nt invention comprises the steps of preparing a mixture comprising a water-insoluble chitosan, water, and an acid. A chitosan salt is formed and is recovered

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from the mixture und r c nditions eff ctive so that th chitosan salt becomes water-swellable and water-insoluble and exhibits desired absorbent properties.

One embodiment of such a process comprises forming a mixture comprising a water-insoluble chitosan, water, and an acid selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and multibasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and all pKan greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1. The mixture may have an equilibrium pH between about 2 and about 6.5. A chitosan salt is formed and recovered from the mixture. The recovered chitosan salt is water swellable and water insoluble and preferably exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

Another embodiment of such a process comprises forming a mixture and an acid comprising a water-insoluble chitosan, water, selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa₁ less than about 6 and multibasic acids having a pKa₁ less than about 6 and all pKan greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1. The mixture may have an equilibrium pH between about 2 and about 6.5. A chitosan salt is formed and recovered from the mixture. The recovered chitosan salt is then treated at a temperature and for a time effective to render the chitosan salt water swellable and water insoluble, wherein the preferably chitosan salt water-insoluble water-swellable, exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

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Another embodiment of such a process comprises forming a mixture comprising a water-insoluble chitosan, water, and an acid selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa less than about 6 and multibasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and all pKan greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1. The mixture may have an equilibrium pH betw en about 2 and about 6.5. A chitosan salt is formed and recovered from the mixture. The r covered chitosan salt is then

treated under humid conditions and for a time effective to render the chitosan salt water swellable and water insoluble, wherein the water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt preferably exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

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Another embodiment of such a process comprises forming a mixture comprising a water-insoluble chitosan salt, water, an acid selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and multibasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and all pKan greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1, and a crosslinking agent. The mixture may have an equilibrium pH between about 2 and about 6.5. A chitosan salt is formed and recovered, along with the crosslinking agent, from the mixture. The recovered chitosan salt is water swellable and water insoluble and preferably exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

Another process of the present invention comprises preparing a chitosan salt from a chitosan in a mixture comprising a nonsolvent and recovering the chitosan salt from the mixture, wherein the chitosan salt comprises an amount of the original crystalline structure of the chitosan to be effective so that the chitosan salt exhibits an effective initial Absorbency Under Load.

One embodiment of such a process comprises preparing a mixture comprising a chitosan comprising an original crystalline structure, water, an acid selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and multibasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and all pKan greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1, and a nonsolvent that is miscible with water and in which both chitosan and the chitosan salt to be formed are insoluble. The water and the nonsolvent are preferably used in amounts in the mixture effective to result in the chitosan and the chitosan salt to be formed not being soluble in the mixture. The mixture

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may have an equilibrium pH between about 2 and ab ut 6.5. A chitosan salt is formed and recovered from the mixture. The recovered chitosan salt is water swellable and water insoluble and preferably exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

Further features and advantages of this invention will become more readily apparent from the following detailed description when taken in conjunction with the accompanying drawing, in which:

Fig. 1 illustrates the apparatus for determining the Absorbency Under Load values of an absorbent material.

Chitin is a cellulose-like material that occurs widely in 15 nature, for example, in the cell walls of fungi and the hard The waste from shrimp, shell of insect and crustaceans. lobster, and crab seafood industries typically contains about 10 to about 15 percent chitin and is a readily available source of In the natural state, chitin generally occurs only in 20 small flakes or short fibrous material, such as from the There is generally no carapace or tendons of crustaceans. source, as with cotton in the cellulosics, that forms useful shaped articles without solution and re-precipitation or r naturing. 25

More specifically, chitin is a mucopolysaccharide, poly-N-acetyl-D-glucosamine with the following formula:

wherein x represents the degree of polymerization. Although x cannot be determined precisely, x is believed to be commonly in the rang f fr m about 50 to about 50,000.

When many of the acetyl groups of chitin are removed by treatment with strong alkalis, the product is chitosan, a high molecular weight linear polymer of 2-deoxy-2-amino glucose. properties of chitosan relate to its polyelectrolyte generally polymeric carbohydrate character. Thus, it is insoluble in water, in alkaline solutions at pH levels above about 6.5, or in organic solvents. It generally dissolves readily in dilute solutions of organic acids such as formic, acetic, tartaric, and citric acids, and also in dilute mineral acids, except, for example, sulfuric acid. In general, the amount of acid required to dissolve chitosan is approximately stoichiometric with the amino groups.

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15 Chitosan is thus not a single, definite chemical entity but varies in composition depending on the conditions of manufacture. It may be equally defined as chitin sufficiently deacetylated to form soluble amine salts. Solutions of chitosan are generally highly viscous, resembling those of natural gums.

20 The cationic properties of the polymer lead to the formation of complexes with anionic polyelectrolytes.

The chitosan used herein is suitably in relatively pure form. Methods for the manufacture of pure chitosan are well known. Generally, chitin is milled into a powder and deminerilized with an organic acid such as acetic acid. Proteins and lipids are then removed by treatment with a base, such as sodium hydroxide, followed by chitin deacetylation by treatment with concentrated base, such as 40 percent sodium hydroxide. The chitosan formed is washed with water until a generally neutral pH is reached.

Suitable chitosans are commercially available from numerous vendors. Exemplary of a commercially available chitosan is a partially deacetylated chitin, having a degree of acetylation of about 0.2 and a viscosity as a 1 weight percent aqueous solution of about 3600 mPa·s (3,600 centipois), available from th Vanson Company.

In one aspect, the present invention concerns a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt that exhibits effective absorbency properties.

5 Chitosan salts suitable for use in the present invention are generally water soluble, prior to treatment of the chitosan salt, to provide the chitosan salt with the desired absorbency characteristics as disclosed herein. After such treatment to provide the chitosan salt with the desired absorbency characteristics, the chitosan salt will generally be water swellable and water insoluble.

As used herein, a material will be considered to be water soluble when it substantially dissolves in excess water to form a solution, thereby, losing its initially particulate form and becoming essentially molecularly dispersed throughout the water solution. As a general rule, the water-soluble chitosan salts will be free from a substantial degree of crosslinking, as crosslinking tends to render the chitosan salts water insoluble.

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As used herein, the term "water-swellable, water-insoluble" is meant to refer to a material that, when exposed to an excess of a 0.9 weight percent solution of sodium chloride in water, swells to its equilibrium volume but does not dissolve into the As such, a water-swellable, water-insoluble material solution. generally retains its original identity or physical structur, but in a highly expanded state, during the absorption of the aqueous solution and, thus, must have sufficient physical integrity to resist flow and fusion with neighboring particles. A water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt useful in the present invention is one which is effectively crosslinked to b substantially water insoluble but still is initially capable of absorbing at least about 14 times its own weight of a 0.9 weight percent solution of sodium chloride in water when under an applied load of about 2.07 kPa (0.3 pound per square inch).

Chitosan salts suitable for use in the pres nt invention include, without limitation, those salts formed by th reacti n

of chitosan and an acid, such as an organic acid or an inorganic Examples of chitosan salts formed with an inorganic acid include chitosan hydrochloride, chitosan hydrobromide, chitosan Examples of chitosan salts phosphate, and mixtures thereof. formed with an organic acid include chitosan formate, chitosan acetate, chitosan propionate, chitosan chloroacetate, chitosan isobutyrate, butyrate, chitosan chitosan hydroxyacetate, chitosan acrylate, and mixtures thereof. It is also suitable to form a chitosan salt using a mixture of acids including, for The most suitable example, both inorganic and organic acids. chitosan salts include chitosan hydrochloride, chitosan formate, chitosan acetate, chitosan propionate, and mixtures thereof.

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Chitosans useful in preparing the chitosan salts of the present invention generally have an average degree of acetylation (D.A.) from 0 to about 0.5, suitably from 0 to about 0.4, and more The degree of acetylation refers suitably from 0 to about 0.3. present acetyl groups average number of anhydroglucose unit of the chitosan material. Generally, the maximum average number of acetyl groups that may be present on the anhydroglucose unit of the chitin material is 1.0. When the chitosan has an average degree of acetylation within the range from 0 to about 0.5, the chitosan is generally water insoluble prior to protonation of the chitosan to provide the chitosan salts with the desired initial absorbency properties of However, one skilled in the art will the present invention. appreciate that other characteristics, such as the actual pattern of acetyl groups of the chitosan, may also have an effect on the water-solubility of the chitosan salt.

Chitosan and chitosan salts may generally have a wide range of molecular weights. Chitosan and chitosan salts having a relatively high molecular weight are often beneficial for use in the present invention. Nonetheless, a wide range of molecular weights is suitable for use in the present invention. It is generally m st conv nient to express the molecular weight of a chitosan or chitosan salt in terms of its viscosity in a 1.0 weight percent aqueous solution at 25°C. Since chitosan is

g nerally ins luble in water at 25°C, it is common to indir ctly measure the viscosity of the chitosan by measuring the viscosity of a corresponding chitosan salt, such as by using a 1 weight Chitosan or chitosan percent acetic acid aqueous solution. salts suitable for use in the present invention will suitably have a viscosity in a 1.0 weight percent aqueous solution at 25°C of from about 100 mPa·s (100 centipoise) to about 80,000 mPa·s 500 suitably from about more (80,000 centipoise), (500 centipoise) to about 80,000 mPa·s (80,000 centipoise), and most suitably from about 1,000 mPa·s (1,000 centipoise) to about 80,000 mPa·s (80,000 centipoise).

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The crosslinked chitosan salts exhibiting improved absorbent properties of the present invention have been found to exhibit relatively low aqueous solution viscosities as compared to chitosan salts that do not exhibit the improved absorbent properties of the present invention. For example, when measured as a 1.0 weight percent amount in a 0.9 weight percent sodium chloride (saline) aqueous solution that has been allowed t reach equilibrium at about 25°C as, for example, after about 18 hours of mixing, the chitosan salts of the present invention have been found to exhibit a viscosity of suitably less than about 400 mPa·s (400 centipoise), more suitably less than about 300 mPa·s (300 centipoise), and most suitably less than about The chitosan salts of the present 200 mPa·s (200 centipoise). invention have been found to exhibit viscosities that are suitably about 50 percent, more suitably about 60 percent, and most suitably about 70 percent less than the viscosity exhibited by an otherwise identical chitosan salt that has not been prepared or treated to exhibit the improved absorbent properties of the present invention. For example, if a chitosan salt that has not been prepared or treated to exhibit the improved absorbent properties of the present invention exhibits viscosity of about 800 mPa·s (800 centipoise), a chitosan salt that has been prepared or treated to exhibit the improved absorbent properties of the present invention will suitably f lss than about 400 (400 $mPa \cdot s$ xhibit a viscosity suitably less than about 320 mPa·s (320 centipois), mor

centipoise), and most suitably less than about 240 mPa·s (240 centipoise).

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The process according to the present invention is found to produce an improvement in initial AUL values in chitosan salts While high molecular over a wide range of molecular weights. weight chitosan salts are generally preferred, it is important that improvements in low molecular weight chitosan salts can be This is because aqueous solutions of high molecular weight chitosan salts exhibit a high viscosity compared to an aqueous solution containing the same concentration of for reasons Thus, molecular weight chitosan salts. efficiency, it is often desirable to form an aqueous solution comprising the highest concentration of chitosan salt possible while still being able to effectively work with the aqueous solution.

The chitosan salts of the present invention have the ability to absorb a liquid while the chitosan salt is under an external pressure or load, herein referred to as Absorbency Under Load synthetic polymeric materials, such as polyacrylates, having a generally high ability to absorb while under a load, have been found to minimize the occurrence of gel-blocking when incorporated in absorbent products. The method by which the Absorbency Under Load is determined is set forth below in connection with the examples. The Absorbency Under Load values determined as set forth below and reported herein refer to the amount in grams of an aqueous solution, containing 0.9 weight percent sodium chloride, a gram of a material can absorb in 60 minutes under a load, for example, of about 2.07 kPa (0.3 pound per square inch (psi)). As a general rule, it is desired that the chitosan salt has an initial Absorbency Under Load value, for a load of about 2.07 kPa (0.3 psi), of at least about 14, beneficially of at least about 17, more beneficially of at least about 20, suitably of at least about 24, more suitably of at least about 27, and up to about 50 grams per gram. herein, the term "initial Absorbency Under Load" is m ant to ref r t that AUL value xhibited by a material as measur d within 1 day after preparation of the material while the material is stored at ambient conditions, such as at about 24°C and between about 30 to about 60 percent relative humidity.

The conditions under which a chitosan salt is stored have been 5 found to potentially have an impact on the absorbent properties Even relatively mild of the chitosan salt as it ages. conditions, such as ambient conditions, such as about 24°C and at least about 30 percent relative humidity, suitably between about 30 to about 60 percent relative humidity, will typically result 10 in a change of the absorbent properties of a chitosan salt as it Typically, storage conditions, such as relatively higher temperatures and/or relatively higher relative humidities, as compared to ambient conditions, may result in quicker and/or more severe change of the absorbent properties of the chitosan 15 salt as it ages.

In one embodiment of the present invention, a chitosan salt will tend to retain its initial AUL value after aging. Specifically, it is beneficial that chitosan salts of the present invention 20 retain greater than about 50 percent, suitably greater than about 70 percent, and more suitably more than about 80 percent of their initial AUL value after aging for about 60 days. Typically, the aging conditions are at ambient conditions, such as at about 24°C and at least about 30 percent relative humidity. 25 For example, if a chitosan salt of the present invention has an initial AUL value of about 20, that chitosan salt beneficially has an AUL value of at least about 10, suitably of at least about 14, and more suitably of at least about 16, after aging for about 60 days at about 24°C and at least about 30 percent 30 relative humidity. Otherwise similar chitosan salts tend not to retain their initial AUL value after aging under similar conditions.

Beneficially, the chitosan salts of the present invention retain gr ater than about 50 percent, suitably greater than about 70 percent, and more suitably gr ater than about 80 percent, of

their initial AUL value after aging for about 20 days at about 24°C and about 100 percent relative humidity.

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As described above, the chitosan salt is suitably a chitosan carboxylate, such as chitosan acetate or chitosan formate, or a chitosan hydrohalide, such as chitosan hydrochloride. chitosan carboxylate or chitosan hydrohalide has an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14, beneficially of at least about 17, more beneficially of at least about 20, suitably of at least about 24, more suitably of at least about Beneficially, such a 27, and up to about 50, grams per gram. chitosan carboxylate or chitosan hydrohalide also retains greater than about 50 percent, suitably greater than about 70 percent, and more suitably greater than about 80 percent, of its initial AUL value after aging for about 60 days at about 24°C relative humidity 30 percent least about beneficially, retains greater than about 50 percent, suitably greater than about 70 percent, and more suitably greater than about 80 percent of its initial AUL value after aging for about 20 days at about 24°C and about 100 percent relative humidity.

Without intending to be bound thereby, it is hypothesized that the aging phenomenon in regards to the AUL is due to the creation of crosslinking points or additional crosslinking As a result of such crosslinking points of the chitosan salt. points or additional crosslinking points, the chitosan salt becomes more rigid or harder, resulting in the chitosan salt becoming less absorbent. Crosslinking points can generally be divided into two groups. First, crosslinking points can be of a relatively permanent crosslinking, such as with ester or amide use of example, from the resulting, for linkages, with coordination agent, or crosslinking multicarboxylic bonding, resulting, for example, from the use of a polyvalent agent, or with physical crosslinks metal ion crosslinking resulting, for example, from a retained crystalline structure. Second, crosslinking points can be of a relatively temporary crosslinking, such as with hydrogen bonding within the chitosan In order to improve the aging stability of the chitosan

salt, it is believed to be d sirable to ssentially maintain the amount of relatively permanent crosslinking that exists within the chitosan salt so that there is neither a substantial increase nor a substantial decrease in the crosslinking of the chitosan salt as it ages.

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It has been found that the chitosan salts of the present invention may be prepared by a variety of processes. In general, an aqueous mixture of a water-insoluble chitosan, water, an acid and, optionally, a crosslinking agent is prepared. Such an aqueous mixture generally comprises from about 0.01 to about 90 weight percent, beneficially from about 0.1 to about 30 weight percent, and suitably from about 2 t about 25 weight percent based on total mixture weight of the chitosan. The mixture generally comprises from about 99.99 t about 10 weight percent, beneficially from about 99.9 to about 70 weight percent, and suitably from about 98 to about 75 weight percent based on total mixture weight of the water.

The chitosan is typically mixed with an aqueous solution beneficially comprising at least about 30 weight percent water, suitably about 50 weight percent water, more suitably about 75 weight percent water, and most suitably 100 weight percent water. When another liquid is employed with the water, such other suitable liquids include methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, and acetone. However, the use or presence of such other non-aqueous liquids may impede the formation of a homogeneous mixture such that the chitosan chains do not effectively dissolve into the aqueous solution and interpenetrate one another.

One process of the present invention comprises preparing the chitosan salt from a chitosan comprising an original crystalline structure and retaining an effective amount of the original crystallinity wherein such retained crystallinity functions as a crosslinking moiety so that the chitosan salt exhibits an effective initial Absorbency Under Load valu.

In such a process, the chitosan is dispersed in a nonsolvent and an acid and water are added to the mixture. As used herein, the term "nonsolvent" is meant to represent a nonaqueous liquid that is miscible with water and in which both chitosan and the chitosan salt to be formed are insoluble. Examples nonsolvents useful in the present invention include methanol, dioxane, glycerol, acetone, isopropanol, ethanol, hexanol, pentanol, butanol, propylene glycol, glycol, Suitable nonsolvents include methanol, mixtures thereof. The water and the ethanol, isopropanol, and mixtures thereof. nonsolvent are used in amounts in the mixture effective to result in the chitosan and the chitosan salt to be formed not being soluble in the mixture.

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The acids are added to the mixture at conditions effective to 15 allow the acids to react with and modify the chitosan to a chitosan salt while retaining an effective amount of the effective the chitosan. Such crystallinity of conditions can vary and will typically depend on, for example, temperature, pressure, mixing conditions, and types and relative 20 amounts of materials, nonsolvents, water and acids used. chitosan salt is then generally recovered from the mixture as, for example, using the methods described herein. Such a final recovered crystalline-crosslinked chitosan salt comprises an amount of the original crystalline structure of the chitosan to 25 be effective to result in the crystalline-crosslinked chitosan salt exhibiting an effective initial Absorbency Under Load value.

Chitosan is generally known to be highly crystalline material. 30 The degree of crystallinity generally depends on the source of The highly-ordered the chitosan and its processing history. structures and the less-ordered amorphous areas accessibilities toward different have generally The result of this difference in chemicals such as acids. 35 accessibility is that th amorphous ar as are, in the case of reaction with an acid, generally protonated first and heaviest, whereas the highly crystalline areas are protonated last and 5

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Swelling f th chit san improves the accessibility of the acid into the crystalline areas and facilitates If the overall degree of protonation of the protonation. chitosan is sufficiently high and the protonated amino groups are relatively uniformly distributed, total solubility of the chitosan salt in an aqueous solution is generally achieved. However, if the overall degree of protonation is relatively low, or the protonated amino groups relatively unevenly distributed, the resulting chitosan salt will have a chain structure of and insoluble segments like a block alternating soluble The insoluble segments would generally be in the copolymer. crystalline areas remaining after the protonation. crystalline area functions as a crosslinking point for the Such crystallinity of the soluble chitosan salt segments. initial chitosan or of the chitosan final product may be determined by analytical methods such as optical microscopy and x-ray diffraction.

Such crystalline-crosslinked chitosan salts generally need to be recovered from the nonsolvent mixture but generally do not need any additional processing steps, such as heat or chemical treatment, in order to exhibit the desired initial AUL value absorbency properties described in this invention.

Chitosan salts exhibiting the desired initial Absorbency Under 25 Load properties herein have been found to generally require being prepared by using an acid selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6, multibasic acids having a pKa_1 less than about 6 and all pKa_n greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1, 30 The use of acids not meeting these and mixtures thereof. requirements has been found to result in chitosan salts that generally do not exhibit the desired initial Absorbency Under The pKa of an acid represents the extent of Load properties. dissociation of or, in other words, the strength of the acid and 35 is intended herein to be measured at the conditions, such as at a specific temperatur, under which the acid is being used in the pr cess of the present inventi n. Suitably, th pKa of the acid is measured at about 25°C. In general, the weaker an acid, the higher its pKa value will be. The pKa values for acids at various temperatures are well known and may be found in any of many available references, such as in the CRC Handbook of Chemistry & Physics, 75th Edition, edited by David R. Lide, pages 8-45, CRC Press (1994).

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As used herein, the term "monobasic acid" is intended to represent an acid having one displacable hydrogen atom per molecule. The monobasic acids should have a pKa1 less than about 6, suitably less than about 5.5, and more suitably less than about 5 as measured at the conditions under which the acid is being used in the process. Examples of monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6, when the pKa1 is measured at about 25°C, include hydrochloric, hydrobromic, hydrofluoric, hypochlorous, iodic, nitrous, perchloric, periodic, acetic, acetoacetic, acrylic, adipamic, m-aminobenzoic, p-aminobenzoic, o-aminobenzosulfonic, m-aminobenzosulfonic, anisic,

- o-β-anisylpropionic, m-β-anisylpropionic, p-β-anisylpropionic, barbituric, benzoic, benzosulfonic, bromoacetic, o-bromobenzoic, m-bromobenzoic, n-butyric, iso-butyric, n-caproic, iso-caproic, chloroacetic, o-chlorobenzoic, m-chlorobenzoic, p-chlorobenzoic, α-chlorobutyric, β-chlorobutyric, γ-chlorobutyric,
- o-chlorocinnamic, m-chlorocinnamic, p-chlorocinnamic, o-chlorophenoxyacetic, m-chlorophenoxyacetic, o-chlorophenylacetic, m-chlorophenylacetic, p-chlorophenylacetic,
 - β -(o-chlorophenyl) propionic, β -(m-chlorophenyl) propionic,
- β-(p-chlorophenyl) propionic, α-chloropropionic,
 β-chloropropionic, cis-cinnamic, trans-cinnamic,
 crotonic (trans-), cyanoacetic, γ-cyanobutyric,
 o-cyanophenoxyacetic, m-cyanophenoxyacetic, pcyanophenoxyacetic, cyanopropionic, dichloroacetic,
- dichloroacetylacetic, dihydroxybenzoic (2,2-), dihydroxybenzoic (2,5-), dihydroxybenzoic (3,4-), dihydroxybenzoic (3,5-), dihydroxymalic, dihydroxytartaric, dimethylmalonic, dinicotinic, dinitroph nol (2,4-), dinitrophenol (3,6-), diphenylacetic,

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ethylbenzoic, ethylphenylacetic, fluorobenzoic, formic, fumaric (trans-), furancarboxylic, furoic, gallic, glutaramic, glycolic, heptanoic, hexahydrobenzoic, hexanoic, hippuric, hydroxy acetic, naphthalenesulfonic, α -naphthoic, β -naphthoic, nitrobenzene, o-nitrobenzoic, m-nitrobenzoic, p-nitrobenzoic, o-nitrophenylacetic, m-nitrophenylacetic, p-nitrophenylacetic, $o-\beta$ -nitrophenylpropionic, $p-\beta$ -nitrophenylopropionic, nonanic, octanoic, phenylacetic, o-phenylbenzoic, \gamma-phenylbutyric, α -phenylbutyric, β -phenylpropionic, β -hydroxybutyric, γ -hydroxybutyric, β -hydroxypropionic, iodoacetic, o-iodobenzoic, m-iodobenzoic, lactic, lutidinic, DL-Mandelic, mesitylenic, methyl-o-aminobenzoic, methyl-m-aminobenzoic, methyl-p-aminobenzoic, o-methylcinnamic, m-methylcinnamic, p-methylcinnamic, β -methylglutaric, methylmalonic, picric, pimelic, propionic, iso-propylbenzoic, 2-pyridinecarboxylic, 3-pyridinecarboxylic, 4-pyridinecarboxylic, quinolinic, suberic, sulfanilic, terephthalic, thioacetic, thiophenecarboxylic, o-toluic, m-toluic, p-toluic, trichloroacetic, trihydoxybenzoic (2,4,6-), trimethylacetic, trinitrophenol (2,4,6-), uric, n-valeric, iso-valeric, vinylacetic acids, and mixtures thereof. Suitable monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6, when the pKa1 is measured at about 25°C, include acetic acid, acrylic acid, n-butyric acid, iso-butyric acid, chloroacetic acid, formic acid, hydrobromic acid, hydrochloric acid, hydroxy acetic acid, propionic acid, and mixtures thereof.

In contrast, examples of monobasic acids having a pKa1 greater than about 6, when the pKa1 is measured at about 25°C, include hypobromous, peroxide, hydrogen hydrocyanic, arsenious, α-aminoacetic alloxanic, allantoin, d-alanine, hypoiodous, 30 o-cresol, m-cresol, cacodylic, o-aminobenzoic, (glycine), p-cresol, glycerol, glycine, glycol, histidine, hydroquinone, o-monochlorophenol, m-monochlorophenol, p-monochlorophenol, m-nitrophenol, o-nitrophenol, β-naphthol, α-naphthol, p-nitrophenol, phenol, γ-hydroxyquinoline, lysine, pyrocatechol, 35 saccharin, theobromine, tryptophan, tyrosine, resorcinol, veronal, and xanthin acids.

It is believed that the use of monobasic acids having a pKal greater than about 6 generally will not result in chitosan salts exhibiting the desired initial Absorbency Under Load properties because such acids are too weak to sufficiently protonate the chitosan to form the desired chitosan salt.

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As used herein, the term "multibasic acid" is intended to represent an acid having more than one displacable hydrogen atom per molecule. Examples of multibasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and all $pKa_{\hat{n}}$ greater than about 5.5, wherein n is chromic, include arsenic, greater than 1, integer tetraboric, sulfurous, tellurous, phosphorous, phosphoric, cyclohexane-1:1-dicarboxylic, DL-aspartic, ascorbic, cyclopropane-1:1-dicarboxylic, dimethylmalic, o-hydroxybenzoic, m-hydroxybenzoic, p-hydroxybenzoic, and maleic, and mixtures thereof.

In contrast, examples of multibasic acids that do not have a pKa₁ less than about 6 and all pKa_n greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1, include o-boric, carbonic, germanic, hydrogen sulfide, pyrophosphoric, m-silicic, o-silicic, telluric, adipic, citric, DL-cysteine, L-cystine, fumaric (trans-), glutaric, oxalic, o-phthalic, m-phthalic,, p-phthalic, itaconic, malic, malonic, mesaconic, methylsuccinic, succinic, α -tartaric, and meso-tartaric. Such acids may have a pKa₁ greater than about 6 or a pKa_n less than about 5.5.

It is believed that the use of a multibasic acid having a pKa1 greater than about 6 generally will not result in chitosan salts exhibiting the desired initial Absorbency Under Load properties because such acids are too weak to sufficiently protonate the chitosan to form the desired chitosan salt. It is believed that the use of a multibasic acid having a pKan less than about 5.5 results in chitosan salts that generally do not exhibit the desired initial Absorbency Under Load properties, because such a multibasic acid essentially acts as a crosslinking agent and generally results in too much crosslinking of the chitosan salt,

negatively affecting the desired absorbent prop rti s of th chitosan salt.

Chitosan salts exhibiting the desired retention of Absorbency Under Load properties with aging have been beneficially prepared by using a combination of acids. For example, as compared to using a single acid such as formic acid or acetic acid, improved aged Absorbency Under Load properties have been found to be achieved by using a combination of, respectively, formic acid and hydrochloric acid or acetic acid and hydrochloric acid.

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As the chitosan reacts with the acid and is protonated, the chitosan is converted to the corresponding chitosan salt. contrast to the initial chitosan, which is generally waterinsoluble, the formed chitosan salt is generally water soluble. As such, as the chitosan salt is formed in the aqueous solution, the chitosan salt dissolves into the aqueous solution. dissolution of the chitosan salt into an aqueous mixture is believed to result in entanglement of individual segments of the chitosan salt with each other. Such entanglement results in the chitosan salt chains interpenetrating one another in the mixture so that a random, coil-entangled molecular configuration occurs which is believed to effectively provide crosslinking points and which assists allowing for additional crosslinking, if desired, of the chitosan salt upon further treatment as, for example, with heat treatment or with humidity treatment. To allow for effective entanglement of individual segments of the chitosan salt with each other, the mixture is suitably allowed to form a stable, homogeneous mixture at equilibrium prior to additional treatment steps to ensure effective dissolution of the chitosan It will be appreciated that a nonwatersalt into the water. soluble portion of the chitosan salt may exist that will typically not dissolve into water. For example, the retained crystalline areas of a crystalline-crosslinked chitosan salt will typically not dissolve in water while the non-crystalline ar as typically will.

The presence of a crosslinking agent, in certain embodiments of processes of the present invention, may improve the initial Absorbency Under Load value of a chitosan salt when compared to an otherwise essentially identical chitosan salt without a crosslinking agent in an otherwise essentially similar process. As such, a crosslinking agent may optionally be used in the process of the present invention.

Crosslinking agents suitable for use in the present invention One suitable crosslinking agent is are generally water soluble. functional groups two having at least compound functionalities capable of reacting with the amido, amino, or hydroxyl groups of a chitosan salt. It is desired that such a crosslinking agent be selected from the group consisting of organic compounds such as dialdehydes, multicarboxylic acids, Specifically, thereof. diepoxides, and mixtures crosslinking agent may be selected from the group consisting of butane tetracarboxylic glutaraldehyde, citric acid, carboxymethyl cellulose, poly(ethylene glycol) diglycidal ether, and bis[polyoxyethylene bis(glycidyl ether)], and mixtures thereof.

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Another suitable crosslinking agent is a multibasic acid having both a pKa1 and a pKa2 that are both less than about 5.5. an acid may have more than two displacable hydrogen atoms per molecule wherein the pKam is less than or greater than 5.5, wherein m is an integer greater than 2. Examples of such acids useful as crosslinking agents herein include pyrophosphoric acid, adipic acid, butane tetracarboxylic acid, citric acid, malic acid, malonic glutaric acid, itaconic acid, mesaconic acid, methylsuccinic acid, oxalic acid, o-phthalic acid, m-phthalic acid, p-phthalic acid, succinic acid, alphatartaric acid, and meso-tartaric acid. Suitably, the agent is selected from adipic acid, butane crosslinking tetracarboxylic acid, citric acid, glutaric acid, itaconic acid, malic acid, succinic acid, and mixtures ther of.

Another suitabl crosslinking agent c mpris s a m tal ion with at least two positive charges and which is effective to form coordination bonds with the chitosan salt, such as Cu²⁺, Fe³⁺, Ce³⁺, Ti⁴⁺, Zr⁴⁺, and Ce⁴⁺. Suitable metal ion crosslinking agents include those of the transition elements which generally have vacant d-orbitals. Suitable metal ion crosslinking agents include CuSO₄, ZrCl₄, FeCl₃, Ce₂(SO₄)₃, and Ce(NH₄)₄(SO₄)₄°2H₂O₇ other well known metal ion compounds and mixtures thereof. Such metal ion crosslinking agents, when used with a chitosan salt, are believed to form chelates with the chitosan salts.

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The crosslinking agent is suitably used in an amount of from about 0.01 to about 20, more suitably of from about 0.05 to about 10, and most suitably of from about 0.1 to about 5 weight percent, based on total weight of the chitosan used to prepare the chitosan salt.

In general, a crosslinking catalyst will not be needed, but may be beneficial, to assist in the crosslinking of the chitosan salts of the present invention. Such crosslinking catalysts can be used in an amount of from about 0.01 to about 3.0 weight percent, suitably from about 0.1 to about 1.0 weight percent based on the total weight of the chitosan used. A suitable crosslinking catalyst, for example, is sodium hypophosphite when citric acid is used as the crosslinking agent.

Generally, the order of mixing the chitosan, water, and acid is not critical in the process of the present invention. As such, either the chitosan or the acid may be added to the water and then the remaining materials subsequently added, or all materials may be added together at essentially the same time. However, it may be beneficial to first add the chitosan and water together so that the chitosan may swell so as to make more of the chitosan accessible to the acid. The acid may then be added to the mixture.

Wh n a crosslinking agent is used, it is generally beneficial to add the crosslinking agent after the other materials have been

mixed together. This is so that the chitosan does not become crosslinked before it is able to be converted to the desired chitosan salt or that the chitosan salt becomes too crosslinked before it is sufficiently protonated. It is particularly beneficial to add the crosslinking agent after the other materials have been mixed together when the crosslinking agent, such as glutaraldehyde, substantially crosslinks the chitosan salt in the mixture as compared to substantially crosslinking the chitosan salt during a later, post-recovery treatment process.

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The aqueous mixture of a chitosan, water, acid, and optionally a crosslinking agent should be prepared under conditions effective to form a chitosan salt. Thus, the mixture can generally be formed at any temperature at which the prepared chitosan salt will be soluble in the water. Generally, such temperatures will be within the range of from about 10°C to about 100°C. As a general rule, it is suitable to form the mixture with agitation.

It has been found that the aqueous mixture must be acidic in 20 order to achieve a chitosan salt that exhibits the desired In particular, absorbent properties of the present invention. it is desired that the mixture used to prepare the chitosan salts of the present invention have an equilibrium pH between about 2 to about 6.5, suitably between about 2.5 to about 6, and 25 more suitably between about 4 to about 6. Mixtures having an equilibrium pH that is either too low or too high have generally been found to not result in chitosan salts exhibiting the used herein, the term absorbent properties. As "equilibrium pH" is meant to represent the pH of the mixture 30 used to prepare the chitosan salt of the present invention when the mixture has reached equilibrium or, in other words, a steady In such a mixture at equilibrium, the chitosan will generally have substantially reacted with the acid to form the desired chitosan salt. 35

Th chitosan salts of the pres nt invention are suitable for use in disposable absorbent products such as personal car products,

such as diapers, training pants, baby wipes, feminine car products, adult incontinent products, and medical products, such as wound dressings or surgical capes or drapes. When the chitosan salt of the present invention is intended for use in disposable absorbent products, it is typically desired that the chitosan salt have a generally neutral or slightly acid character.

After forming a mixture of chitosan, water, acid, and, optionally, a crosslinking agent, a chitosan salt is formed and is desirably recovered from the mixture. If a crosslinking agent is used, the crosslinking agent should also be recovered with the chitosan salt from the mixture. Any method of recovering the chitosan salt and the crosslinking agent, if used, from the mixture, without unacceptably deteriorating the absorption properties of the chitosan salt, is suitable for use in the present invention. Examples of such methods include evaporative drying, freeze drying, precipitation, critical point drying, and the like.

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As used herein, recovery of the chitosan salt and a crosslinking agent, if used, from the mixture is meant to represent that substantially all of the water and, if present, nonsolvent is separated from the chitosan prior to additional treatment steps. It will be appreciated however that, even after removal of substantially all of the water and nonsolvent, a small amount of water and nonsolvent may remain entrapped within the structure The amount of water and nonsolvent of the chitosan salt. remaining entrapped within the structure of the chitosan salt will typically depend on the method and conditions under which Generally, less than about 15 the chitosan salt is recovered. weight percent, suitably less than about 10 weight percent, and more suitably less than about 5 weight percent, of the original amount of water and nonsolvent in the mixture will remain entrapped within the recovered chitosan salt.

Suitably, the chitosan salt and a crosslinking ag nt, if us d, are recov red from the mixture with evaporative drying. As a

general rule, the chitosan salt can be recovered by evaporative drying at a temperature within the range of from about 10°C to about 10°C, suitably from about 40°C to about 60°C. Naturally, higher temperatures can be employed if the mixture is placed under pressure. Lower temperatures can be employed if the mixture is placed under a vacuum.

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Other methods of recovery include precipitation in which a precipitating agent, such as methanol, ethanol, isopropanol, or acetone is added to the mixture to precipitate the chitosan salt and the crosslinking agent, if used, out of the mixture. The chitosan and the crosslinking agent, if used, can then be recovered by filtration. If precipitation is used to recover the chitosan salt, it may be desirable to wash the recovered chitosan salt to remove the precipitating agent.

Depending on the form in which the chitosan salt is recovered, it may be necessary or desirable to alter the form of the chitosan salt. For example, if evaporative drying is employed, the chitosan salt may be recovered in the form of a film or sheet. It may be desirable to comminute the film or sheet material into particles or flakes of material.

The form of the recovered chitosan salt desired will depend to a large extent on the use for which it is intended. When the chitosan salt is intended for use in absorbent personal care products, it is generally desired that the chitosan salt be in the form of a discrete particle, fiber or flake. When in the form of a particle, it is generally desired that the particle have a maximum cross-sectional dimension within the range from about 50 μ m to about 2,000 μ m, suitably within the range from about 100 μ m to about 1,000 μ m, beneficially within the range from about 300 μ m to about 600 μ m.

It may be desirable to treat a chitosan salt, after it has been recovered from the mixture in which it was prepared, under conditions effective to result in the chitosan salt bec ming water swellable and water ins luble and exhibiting the desired

initial Absorbency Und r Load valu. In order to prepare such a desired chitosan salt, it may be desirable to use more than one post-recovery treatment methods.

In one embodiment of the process of the present invention, the recovered chitosan salt and the crosslinking agent, if used, are desirably heat treated at an elevated temperature for a period of time. Such heattreatment should be effective to result in crosslinking or additionally crosslinking the chitosan salt effective to achieve the desired initial AUL value as described herein.

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In general, if heat treatment is necessary, any combination of temperature and time which is effective in achieving a desired degree of crosslinking, without undesirable damage to the chitosan salt, so that the chitosan salt becomes water swellabl and water insoluble and exhibits a desired initial AUL value as described herein, is suitable for use in the present invention. As a general rule, the chitosan salt will be heat treated at a temperature within the range beneficially from about 50°C to about 250°C, suitably from about 80°C to about 250°C, more suitably from about 80°C to about 200°C, and most suitably from about 90°C to about 140°C. The higher the temperature employed, the shorter the period of time generally necessary to achiev the desired degree of crosslinking.

Generally, the heat treating process will extend over a time period within the range of from about 1 minute to about 600 minutes, beneficially from about 2 minutes to about 200 minutes, and suitably from about 5 minutes to about 100 minutes.

By using an acid that is volatile to prepare the chitosan salt of the present invention, the time necessary to effect the insolubilization of the chitosan salt may be shortened. Without intending to be bound hereby, this is believed to be becaus evaporation of the volatile acid from the chitosan salt will g n rally result in there being mor free amino groups pr sent s that a r lativ ly more crystallite or highly ordered

structure will result that acts as crosslinkage bonds within the structure of the chitosan salt. Providing the mixture with a relatively less volatile acid tends to lengthen the time of the crosslinking process, at a given temperature, compared to the use of a relatively more volatile acid. Nonetheless, similar general absorptive properties can generally be achieved with the use of either a volatile or a nonvolatile acid.

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As used herein, a "volatile acid" or "an acid that is volatile" is intended to represent an acid that may be disassociated from the chitosan salt in which the acid is incorporated at a temperature less than about 200°C. In general, a volatile acid will be an acid that has a boiling point less than about 200°C. However, if the acid forms bonds that are too strong within the chitosan salt, such an acid may not be capable of being readily disassociated from the chitosan salt even though the acid has a less than about 200°C. Thus, for example, boiling point hydrochloric acid has a boiling point less than about 200°C but forms such strong bonds within the chitosan salt that the essentially incapable of hydrochloric acid is disassociated from the chitosan salt even at temperatures up to Examples of acids suitable for use as a volatile about 200°C. acid herein include formic acid, acetic acid, propionic acid, As used herein, and mixtures thereof. acid, "nonvolatile acid" is intended to represent an acid that will not be disassociated from the chitosan salt in which the acid is incorporated at a temperature less than about 200°C. In general, a nonvolatile acid will have a boiling point greater than about 200°C or, as discussed above, has a boiling point less than about 200°C but forms such strong bonds within the chitosan salt that the acid will not easily disassociate from the chitosan salt. Examples of acids suitable for use as a nonvolatile acid herein include hydrochloric acid or phosphoric acid. instances, it may be desired to use both a volatile and a nonvolatile acid in the mixture used to prepare the chitosan For example, a volatile acid, such as formic acid or acetic acid, may be used in combination with a nonvolatile acid such as hydr chloric acid or phosphoric acid.

In one embodiment of the process of the present invention, the recovered chitosan salt and the crosslinking agent, if used, are desirably treated under conditions of humidity for a period of time. Such humidity treatment should be effective to result in crosslinking or additionally crosslinking the chitosan salt effective to achieve the desired initial AUL value as described herein.

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In general, if humidity treatment is necessary, any combination 10 of humidity and time which is effective in achieving a desired degree of crosslinking, without undesirable damage to chitosan salt, so that the chitosan salt becomes water swellable and water insoluble and exhibits a desired initial AUL value as described herein, is suitable for use in the present invention. 15 As a general rule, the chitosan salt will be treated at a humidity within the range beneficially from about 75 percent relative humidity to 100 percent relative humidity, suitably from about 90 percent relative humidity to 100 percent relative humidity, more suitably from about 95 percent relative humidity 20 to 100 percent relative humidity, and most suitably at about 100 The higher the humidity employed, percent relative humidity. the shorter the period of time generally necessary to achieve the desired degree of crosslinking.

Generally, the humidity treating process will extend over a tim period within the range of from about 1 day to about 60 days, suitably from about 1 day to about 40 days, and more suitably from about 1 day to about 30 days.

The heat treating or humidity treating processes generally cause the chitosan salt to crosslink or additionally crosslink and become generally water swellable and water insoluble. Without intending to be bound hereby, it is believed that the heat treating or humidity treating process causes the chitosan salt to undergo both physical and chemical crosslinking. Est rification is believed to occur betw en certain crosslinking agents and the hydroxyl groups of the chitosan salt. In the

absence of a crosslinking agent, heat treatment or humidity treatment of the chitosan salt is believed to result in a crystallization of the chitosan salt structure.

- There is generally an optimum degree or amount of crosslinking of a particular chitosan salt that optimizes the initial Absorbency Under Load value and, desirably, the aging stability of the particular chitosan salt. If too little crosslinking occurs, the chitosan salt may possess a relatively low initial Absorbency Under Load value due to a lack of gel strength. If too much crosslinking occurs, the chitosan salt may similarly have a relatively low initial Absorbency Under Load value due to the inability of the chitosan salt to absorb liquid.
- Any method of recovering the chitosan salt from a mixture, without unacceptably deteriorating the absorption characteristics of the chitosan salt, is suitable for use in the present invention. Examples of such methods include evaporative drying, freeze drying, precipitation, critical point drying, and the like.

Those skilled in the art will recognize that the presence of crosslinks formed by either chemical bonds such, as esterification, or by physical structure crystallization can generally be detected through various analytical techniques. For example, infrared spectroscopy, X-ray diffraction, and nuclear magnetic resonance can be used to verify the presence of chemical bonding and physical structure crystallite crosslinks.

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In another aspect, the present invention relates to a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt characterized in that the chitosan salt possesses crosslinks formed by chemical bonding or physical structure crosslinking. Such a chitosan salt is suitably formed by the methods described above.

Nonetheless, the described methods are not intended to be the exclusive methods by which such a chitosan salt can be formed.

Test Methods

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Absorbency Under Load

- The Absorbency Under Load (AUL) is a test which measures the ability of an absorbent material to absorb a liquid (such as a 0.9 weight percent solution of sodium chloride in distilled water) while under an applied load or restraining force.
- Referring to Fig. 1, the apparatus and method for determining 10 Shown is a perspective view of the AUL will be described. apparatus in position during a test. Shown is a laboratory jack 1 having an adjustable knob 2 for raising and lowering the platform 3. A laboratory stand 4 supports a spring 5 connected to a modified thickness meter probe 6, which passes through the 15 housing 7 of the meter, which is rigidly supported by the A plastic sample cup 8, which contains th laboratory stand. tested, to be material sample superabsorbent liquid-permeable bottom and rests within a Petri dish 9 which contains the saline solution to be absorbed. A weight 10 rests 20 on top of a spacer disc (not visible) resting on top of the superabsorbent material sample (not visible).
- The sample cup consists of a plastic cylinder having a 2.54 cm (1 inch) inside diameter and an outside diameter of 3.175 cm (1.25 inches). The bottom of the sample cup is formed by adhering a 100 mesh metal screen having 150 μm openings to the end of the cylinder by heating the screen above the melting point of the plastic and pressing the plastic cylinder against the hot screen to melt the plastic and bond the screen to the plastic cylinder.

The modified thickness meter used to measure the expansion of the sample while absorbing the saline solution is a Mitutoyo Digimatic Indicator, IDC Series 543, Model 543-180, having a range of 0-1.27 cm (0-0.5 inch) and an accuracy of 1.27 µm (0.00005 inch) (Mitutoyo Corporation, 31-19, Shiba 5-chome, Minato-ku, Tokyo 108, Japan). As supplied from Mitutoyo

Corporation, the thickness meter contains a spring attached to the probe within the meter housing. This spring is removed to provide a free-falling probe which has a downward force of about 27 grams. In addition, the cap over the top of the probe, located on the top of the meter housing, is also removed to enable attachment of the probe to the suspension spring 5 (available from McMaster-Carr Supply Co., Chicago, Illinois, Item No. 9640K41), which serves to counter or reduce the downward force of the probe to about 1 gram \pm 0.5 gram. A wire hook can be glued to the top of the probe for attachment to the suspension spring. The bottom tip of the probe is also provided with an extension needle (Mitutoyo Corporation, Part No. 131279) to enable the probe to be inserted into the sample cup.

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To carry out the test, a 0.160 gram sample of the absorbent material, which has been sieved to a particle size between 300 and 600 μm , is placed into the sample cup. The sample is then covered with a plastic spacer disc, weighing 4.4 grams, which is slightly smaller than the inside diameter of the sample cup and serves to protect the sample from being disturbed during the The 100 gram weight is then placed on top of the spacer disc, thereby applying a load of about 2.07 kPa (0.3 pound per square inch). The sample cup is placed in the Petri dish on the platform and the laboratory jack raised up until it contacts the A sufficient amount of The meter is zeroed. tip of the probe. saline solution is added to the Petri dish (50-100 milliliters) to begin the test. The AUL can be determined by determining the weight difference between the sample cup before and after the the weight difference being the amount of The weight of saline solution absorbed absorbed by the sample. after about 60 minutes is the AUL value expressed as grams If desired, the saline solution absorbed per gram of absorbent. readings of the modified thickness meter can be continuously inputted to a computer (Mitutoyo Digimatic Miniprocessor DP-2 DX) to make the calculations and provide AUL readings. cross-ch ck, the AUL can also be d t rmined by determining the distance the 100 gram weight is raised by the expanding sample as it absorbs the saline solution, as measured by the probe.

This distance, multiplied by the cross-sectional area insid th sample cup, is a measure of the expansion volume of the sample due to absorption. Factoring in the density of the saline solution and the weight of the sample, the amount of saline solution absorbed is readily calculated.

Examples

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In the examples, various chitosan materials were used as the starting material in the preparation of chitosan salts. identification, these chitosans are identified by letter, such as by Chitosan A, Chitosan B, and the like. respective properties of these chitosans are shown in Table 1, acetylation represents the degree of D.A. which: in represents Viscosity chitosan; of the substitution Brookfield viscosity, in centipoise (cps), of the chitosan as measured at about 23°C of a 1 weight percent solution in 1 weight percent aqueous acetic acid; Mw represents the weight average molecular weight, as measured by gel permeation chromotagraphy, of the chitosan; and Mn represents the number average molecular weight, as measured by gel permeation chromotagraphy, of the Chitosans A-F were obtained from the Vanson Company of the United States. Chitosan G was obtained from Ajinomot Co. Inc. of Japan.

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2.5			TABLE 1		
		D.A.	Viscosity (mPa·s (cps))	Mw	<u>Mn</u>
	Chitosan A	0.07	170	880,000	330,000
	Chitosan B	0.21	1,400	2,000,000	790,000
30	Chitosan C	0.15	3,500	3,500,000	1,700,000
	Chitosan D	0.14	11,400		
	Chitosan E	0.17	3,600	2,650,000	900,000
	Chitosan F	0.21	3,000	1,744,000	570,000
	Chitosan G	0.20	1,100		

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Example 1

Samples f Chitosan B (4.5 grams) were mix d with about 188 grams of aqueous soluti ns of various acids. The mixtures were

stirred for several hours during which the chitosan reacted with the acids to form chitosan salts which dissolved into the solution. The equilibrium pH of the mixture was measured after dissolution of the chitosan salt into the solution. obtained liquid mixtures were then treated with various amounts of a 2.5 weight per cent aqueous solution of glutaraldehyde homogenized by thoroughly stirring by hand and then air dried at about 23°C for about 16 hours on a Petri dish. After such drying, the solid materials were ground in a Waring blender and a fraction of particulates (300 μm to 600 μm) was collected for each sample for measurement of the AUL. The AUL measurements, type of acid used, the equilibrium pH of the mixture, and the amount of glutaraldehyde solution used, given as a weight percent based on the weight of chitosan used, for these samples are shown in Table 2.

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		TABLE 2		
_	s_ia ugod	рН	Amount of glutaraldehyde (weight %)	Initial AUL (g/g)
5	Acid used			
	ar alarah lamia	5.2	0.35	17.6
	Hydrochloric	5.2	0.9	17.6
	Hydrochloric	5.4	1.6	15.1
	Hydrochloric	3.1	1.8	15.6
10	Hydrochloric		0.9	7.3
	Hydrochloric	1.1	1.8	11.0
	Hydrochloric	1.1	2.7	11.8
	Hydrochloric	1.1	3.5	8.0
	Hydrochloric	1.1	1.3	6.0
15	Hydrochloric	0.7	2.3	7.5
	Hydrochloric	0.7	2.6	7.0
	Hydrochloric	0.7	2.0	,,,
	_	2 7	0.9	14.1
	Formic	3.7	1.8	13.6
20	Formic	3.7	2.7	13.3
	Formic	3.7	2.7	
		4.9	0.9	17.3
	Acetic	4.9	1.8	15.5
	Acetic	4.9	2.7	15.4
25	Acetic		0.9	8.0
	Acetic	1.5	2.7	. 9.5
	Acetic	1.5	11.0	7.0
	Acetic	1.5	11.0	
30	Propionic	5.5	1.8	14.6
		2.4	1.8	3.8
	Citric Citric	4.0ª	1.8	

 $^{^{}m a}$ Chitosan was not completely soluble in the citric acid solution at pH 4

40 Example 2

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Various chitosans (4.5 grams) were mixed with about 188 grams of aqueous solutions of hydrochloric acid. The mixtures wer stirred for several hours during which the chitosan reacted with the acid to form chitosan hydrochloride which dissolved into the solution. The solutions all had an equilibrium pH between about 5.0 and 5.5. The obtained liquid mixtures were then treated with various amounts of a 2.5 weight percent aqueous solution of glutaraldehyde, homogeniz d by thoroughly stirring by hand, and th n air dried at about 23°C for about 16 hours on a P tri dish.

After such drying, the solid materials were ground in a Waring blender and a fraction of particulates (300 μm to 600 μm) was collected for each sample for measurement of the AUL. The AUL measurements and the amount of glutaraldehyde solution used for these samples are shown in Table 3.

TABLE 3

Starting Chitosan Material	Amount of glutaraldehyde (weight %)	Initial AUI (g/g)
Material		
Chitosan A	0.7	11.7
	1.1	9.9
Chitosan A	2.2	8.1
Chitosan A	2.2	4.2
Chitosan B	0.35	17.6
Chitosan B	0.9	17.6
Chitosan B	1.6	15.1
		24.1
Chitosan C	0.35	
Chitosan C	0.7	20.3
Chitosan C	1.1	17.5

Example 3

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Chitosan C (4.5 grams) was mixed with about 188 grams of aqueous The mixtures were stirred for solution of hydrochloric acid. several hours during which the chitosan reacted with the acid to form chitosan hydrochloride which dissolved into the solution. The solutions all had an equilibrium pH between about 5.0 and The obtained liquid mixture was then treated with various amounts of aqueous solutions of various crosslinking agents. The mixture was then homogenized by thoroughly stirring by hand and then air dried at about 23°C for about 16 hours on a Petri After such drying, the solid materials were ground in a Waring blender and a fraction of particulates (300 μm to 600 μm) was collected for each sample for measurement of the AUL. AUL measurements and the crosslinker type and amount for these samples, given as a weight perc nt based on the weight of In Tabl 4, th number in chitosan us d, ar shown in Tabl 4.

parentheses after some of the names of the cr sslinking agents refers to the average molecular weight of that particular crosslinking agent. The carboxymethyl cellulose had a degree of carboxymethyl substitution of about 0.8 and exhibited a Brookfield viscosity at about 25°C as a 4 weight percent aqueous solution of about 35 mPa·s (35 centipoise).

TABLE 4

Kind of Crosslinker	Amount of crosslinker (weight %)	AUL (g/g)
Glutaraldehyde	0.35	24.1
Carboxymethyl Cellulose	1.5	14.7
Poly(ethylene glycol)		
diglycidal ether (200)	0.3	15.0
Poly(ethylene glycol)		•
diglycidal ether (400)	0.5	17.0
Bis[polyoxyethylene		
bis(glycidyl ether)] (20,0	00) 10	16.0
CuSO4	5	14.8

25 Example 4

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Chitosan B (8.5 g) was heated at 85°C for 1 hour and was then dispersed in a mixture (200 mL) of 80 volume per isopropanol and 20 volume percent water. An aqueous solution weight hydrochloric acid having a g) concentration of 37 was then dropped into the slurry under mixture the mechanical stirring until equilibrium pH of about 4.7. The slurry was subsequently left The obtained insoluble 3 hours, filtered and dried. chitosan salt was then dispersed in water at a concentration of 2 weight percent to make a translucent dispersion which was then air dried at about 23°C for about 16 hours. After such drying, the solid material was ground in a Waring blender and a fraction of particulates (300 μm to 600 μm) had an initial AUL of 15.0 g/g.

Example 5

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Samples of various chitosans (20 grams) were individually added into 1000 ml of distilled water to form a 2% suspension. Acetic acid (8.5 grams) or formic acid (5.7 grams) was added into the 5 suspension while stirring. The resulting mixtures containing water, chitosan, and acid were then thoroughly mixed for at least 5 hours at 23°C. The equilibrium pH of the mixture was The completely dissolved chitosan salt was then measured. recovered from the solution by evaporative drying at 50°C in a After drying, the recovered Blue M air-convection oven. chitosan salt was ground into granules in a blender and heat treated at various temperatures for specific times. The initial Absorbency Under Load values of the various chitosan salts so prepared were measured. The exact combination of chitosan and 15 acid and its peak AUL value are set forth in Table 5.

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					T	C STORY				
Starting		:	Heat		Ini	Initial AUL (g/g)	(6/6)			
Chitosan Material	М	Chitosan Salt	(°C)	Omin	Smin	10min	15min	20min	25min	30 min
Chitosan D	5.6		100	6.9	13.5	15.7	18.9	22.1	24.3	22.6
	5.5	Acetate	06	7.8	14.5	18.6	20.4	22.5	21.5	20.4
1	,		100	9.9	10.3	13.5	16.2	21.8	22.4	20.4
Curcosan c	5.5	Acetate	06	15.7	17.4	18.5	19.3	20.9	18.3	16.9
7 C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C C	ر. ح		100	8.7	15.3	18.9	21.5	20.4	19.2	ł
Curcosan e	5.0	Acetate	06	13.2	16.4	18.7	19.1	17.5	14.3	!
+ 4 5 6 8	, ,	Formate	96	12.4	18.0	20.4	20.7	22.3	21.6	20.2
			06	14.2	19.4	16.2	13.4	10.8	†	;
4 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7 7			110	5.7	11.4	13.5	14.6	16.9	14.2	12.1
Curt san c		Acetate	06	10.2	12.0	14.3	15.2	11.3	9.6	1

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Example 6

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Samples of Chitosan C and Chitosan F (20 grams) were individually added into 1000 ml of distilled water to form a 2% suspension. Formic acid (5.7 grams), 7.2 grams of acetic acid, 11.7 grams of 37 grams of propionic acid, hydrochloric acid, 11.6 grams of phosphoric acid, 15.6 grams of glutaric acid, or 22.7 grams of citric acid were separately added into respective suspensions with agitation. Molar ratio The resulting mixtures of the acid to chitosan is 1 to 1. containing water, chitosan, and acid were then thoroughly mixed for at least 8 hours at about 23°C. The equilibrium pH of the mixture was then measured. The completely dissolved chitosan salt was recovered from the solution by evaporative drying at 40° C in a Blue M air-convection oven. After drying, the recovered chitosan salt was ground into granules in a blender and heat treated at various temperatures for specific times. The initial Absorbency Under Load values of the various chitosan salts so prepared were measured. The exact combination of chitosan and acid and its initial AUL value are set forth in Table 6.

TABLE

		i E					Initi	Initial AUL (9/9)	(6/6)					
Chicosan Salt	Hd	(30)	0min	Smin	10min	5min 10min 15min	20min	20min 30min 40min	40min		50min 60min 70min 80min 90min	70min	80min	90min
Formate Chitosan C Chitosan F	5.7	06	6.6	18.0	9.4	20.7	9.9	13.2	16.3 18.2	20.7	22.2	23.6	21.7	20.1
Acetate Chitosan C Chitosan F	ა. გ. გ.	06	15.7	17.4	18.5 16.2	19.3	20.9	16.9						
Propionate Chitosan C Chitosan F	5.3 5.5	06	15.4 13.8	10.9 9.1	8.7	5.0	6.3							
Hydrochloride Chitosan C	de 4.0	150	7.8	7.5	7.6	8.	6.3	6.4						
Phosphate Chitosan C	4.5	150	9.4	8.1	7.8	7.5	7.2	6.8						
Glutamate Chitosan F	5.0	120	8.0	7.8	6.1	5.3	4.1							
Citrate Chitosan C	4.8	100	8.7	8.2	7.0	6.2	5.3							

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Example 7

Samples of Chitosan F (20 grams) were added into 1000 ml of distilled water to form a 2% suspension. Formic acid (5.7 grams), 7.1 grams of acetic acid, 8.7 grams of propionic acid, 5 or 11.7 grams of 37 wt% hydrochloric acid was added into the The molar ratio of the acid to suspension with agitation. chitosan was about 1 to 1. The resulting mixtures containing water, chitosan, and acid were then thoroughly mixed for at least 8 hours at 23°C. The equilibrium pH of each mixture was 10 then measured. The mixture containing hydrochloric acid had an equilibrium pH of about 4.3. The mixtures containing the other acids each had an equilibrium pH of about 5.5. The completely dissolved chitosan salt was recovered from the solution by evaporative drying at 40°C in a Blue M air-convection oven. 15 After drying, the recovered chitosan salt is ground into granules in a blender and placed in a chamber, which has a relative humidity of 100% at room temperature (about 23°C), and aged for 5, 10, 20, 30 and 40 days. The aged chitosan salts were then dried at ambient condition (30% to 50% relative 20 humidity, room temperature (about 23°C)) for two days before measuring the aged AUL. The initial and aged Absorbency Under Load values of the various chitosan salts so prepared are The exact combination of chitosan and acid and its measured. AUL value are set forth in Table 7.

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TABLE 7

5	Time of Aging (Days)	Chitosan Hydrochloride	AUL (g/g) Chitosan Formate	Chitosan Acetate	Chitosan Propionate
	. 0	8.1	12.4	14.2	13.8
	5	8.5	15.8	7.3 (H)	4.2 (H)
	10	10.9	16.3	6.3 (H)	•
10	20	13.7	14.3		
	30	15.8	10.1 (H)		
	40	16.7		6.33	

(H) stands for very hard chitosan gel even after being fully saturated.

15 Example 8

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Samples of Chitosan C (20 grams) were added into 1000 ml of distilled water to form 2 weight percent suspensions. acid (5.7 grams), acetic acid (7.1 grams), or a mixture of acids (4.3 g formic acid/2.9 g 37% HCL, 2.8 g formic acid/5.9 g 37% HCL, 5.3 g acetic acid/2.9 g 37% HCL, or 3.5 g acetic acid/5.9 g 37% HCL) were separately added into the suspensions with agitation. The molar ratio of acid or mixture of acids to amino The resulting mixtures group of chitosan was about 1 to 1. containing water, chitosan, and acid were then thoroughly mixed for at least 8 hours at 23°C. The equilibrium pH of the mixtures were then measured. All of the mixtures had an equilibrium pH The completely dissolved between about 5.0 and about 5.5. chitosan salt was recovered from the solution by evaporative drying at 40°C in a Blue M air-convection oven. After drying, the recovered chitosan salts were ground into granules in a blender and heat treated at 90°C for a sufficient time. initial Absorbency Under Load values of the various chitosan salts so prepared are measured. The heat treated chitosan salts are placed in a chamber, which has a relative humidity of 100% at room temperature, and aged for 5, 10, 20 and 30 days. aged chitosan salts are then dried at ambient conditions (about 30 percent to about 50 percent relative humidity at room temperature (about 23°C)) for two days b fore measuring AUL. The exact combination of chitosan and acid and its initial or aged AUL value are set forth in Table 8.

TABLE 8

5 AUL (g/g) Time of Chitosan Chitosan Chitosan Chitosan Chitosan Chitosan Aging HAC/HCL HAC/HCL HCOOH/HCL HCOOH/HCL **Acetate Formate** (Days) (1:1)(3:1) (3:1)(1:1)17.1 19.2 20.9 19.8 20.5 0 22.2 10 14.9 16.7 14.3 18.6 18.1 18.8 10 14.1 14.6 6.8 17.2 17.8 20 14.3 30 10.1 14.1 16.2

15 Example 9

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A sample of Chitosan D (20 grams) was suspended in 900 ml of Thirty milliliters of mixed acid distilled water with stirring. solution having a concentration of 1M acetic acid and hydrochloric acid was added to the stirred chitosan suspension at room temperature (about 23°C). After 10 hours of mixing, the chitosan salt solution was titrated with the above-mentioned mixed acid solution until a transparent solution of chitosan salt having an equilibrium pH range of between about 5.2 and about 5.5 was obtained. The concentration of the chitosan salt Then, 0.026 gm of citric solution was about 2 weight percent. acid as a crosslinking agent (dissolved in 10 ml of distilled In some cases, water) was added to the chitosan salt solution. also added sodium hypophosphite was of The solution is mixed well at 23°C, crosslinking catalyst. poured into Teflon-lined trays, and dried in a convection oven Physical measurements of the at 40°C for about 24 hours. substantially that indicate generally salt chitosan After grinding and crosslinking has occurred at this point. sieving, the 300-600 μm size fraction is cured at various temperatures for various lengths of time. The AUL results are set forth in Table 9.

The chitosan salt sample that was prepar d without the sodium hypophosphite catalyst was cured at 100°C for 60 minutes and was

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evaluated for AUL age-stability. The chitosan salt was treat d for 10 days in a 100 percent relative humidity environment at about 23°C. The aged chitosan salt exhibited an AUL of 16.1 g/g.

TABLE 9 5 Initial AUL (g/g) After Curing for Various Time Periods (min) Curing Citric Acid: Sodium Hypophosphite Temp. 80 40 60 30 weight ratio 10 20 (°C) 8.6 --__ 1:0 10 50 _-12.5 --__ ----1:0 90 18.8 20.1 19.3 18 1:0 --17 100 20.5 19.5 --18.5 16 18.1 1:0.5 100 15.1 17 18 18.5 19 17.8 1:0 110 __ 19.7 16.5 19.1 19.5 1:0.5 18 110 15 11.5 11.3 12.2 12.5 12.4 1:0 14.2 130 10.8 1:0 150

While the present invention has been described in terms of the specific embodiments described above, numerous equivalent changes and modifications will be clear to those skilled in the art. Accordingly, the specific examples set forth above are not intended to limit in any manner the scope of the invention as set forth in the appended claims.

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CLAIMS

1. A process for preparing a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt, the process comprising: forming a mixture comprising a chitosan, water, and an acid 5 selected from the group consisting of monobasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and multibasic acids having a pKa1 less than about 6 and all pKan greater than about 5.5, wherein n is an integer greater than 1, wherein the mixture has an equilibrium pH between about 2 and about 6.5, and 10 wherein the mixture is prepared under conditions effective to form a chitosan salt; and recovering the chitosan salt from the mixture, wherein the

chitosan salt is water swellable and water insoluble.

- 2. The process according to claim 1 wherein the chitosan is water-insoluble.
- 3. The process according to claim 1 or 2 wherein the waterswellable and water-insoluble chitosan salt exhibits an 20 initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.

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- 4. The process according to claim 2 or 3 wherein the chitosan salt recovered from the mixture is water soluble. 25
 - process according to claim 2, further comprising treating said recovered water-soluble chitosan salt at a temperature and for an amount of time effective to render said chitosan salt water swellable and water insoluble.
 - 6. The process according to claim 5, further comprising treating said recovered chitosan salt at a temperature above about 50°C for a time effective to render said chitosan salt water swellable and water insoluble.

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7. The process acc rding to claim 5 or 6 wh rein said chitosan salt is treated at a temperature of from about 50°C to about 250°C for a time of from about 1 minute to about 600 minutes.

5 8. The process according to claims 4 to 7, further comprising treating said recovered water-soluble chitosan salt at a humid condition and for an amount of time effective to render said chitosan salt water swellable and water insoluble.

9. The process according to claim 8 wherein said chitosan salt is treated at a humidity of from about 75 percent relative humidity to about 100 percent relative humidity for a time of from about 1 day to about 60 days.

10. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the chitosan comprises an original crystalline structure, and said mixture further comprises a nonsolvent that is miscible with water and in which both chitosan and the chitosan salt to be formed are insoluble,

wherein the water and the nonsolvent are used in amounts in the mixture effective to result in the chitosan and the chitosan salt to be formed not being soluble in the mixture, and wherein the chitosan salt comprises an amount of the original crystalline structure of the chitosan to be effective to result in the chitosan salt being water swellable and water insoluble.

- 11. The process according to claim 10 wherein the nonsolvent is selected from methanol, ethanol, acetone, isopropanol, dioxane, glycerol, ethylene glycol, propylene glycol, butanol, pentanol, hexanol, or mixtures thereof.
- 12. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein
 the chitosan has an average degree of acetylation of from 0
 to about 0.5.

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13. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the chitosan salt is chitosan hydrochloride, chitosan hydrobromide, chitosan phosphate, chitosan formate, chitosan acetate, chitosan propionate, chitosan chloroacetate, chitosan hydroxyacetate, chitosan butyrate, chitosan isobutyrate, chitosan acrylate, or mixtures thereof.

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- 14. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the chitosan salt is chitosan hydrochloride, chitosan formate, chitosan acetate, chitosan propionate, or mixtures thereof.
 - 15. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the acid is acetic acid, acrylic acid, n-butyric acid, isobutyric acid, chloroacetic acid, formic acid, hydrobromic acid, hydrochloric acid, hydroxy acetic acid, propionic acid, phosphoric acid, and mixtures thereof.
- 16. The process according to claim 15 wherein the acid is hydrochloric acid, formic acid, acetic acid, propionic acid, or mixtures thereof.
 - 17. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the mixture further comprises a crosslinking agent and the crosslinking agent is recovered with the chitosan salt.
 - 18. The process according to claim 17 wherein the crosslinking agent is selected from the group consisting of a compound comprising at least two functional groups capable of reacting with an amido, amino, or hydroxyl group of a chitosan salt or a metal ion with at least two positive charges and which is effective to form coordination bonds with the chitosan salt.
- 19. The process according to claim 17 or 18 wherein said crosslinking agent is selected fr m the gr up consisting f dialdehydes, multicarboxylic acids, diepoxides, and mixtures thereof.

- 20. The process according to any of claims 17 to 19 wherein the crosslinking agent is selected from the group consisting of glutaraldehyde, citric acid, butane tetracarboxylic acid, carboxymethyl cellulose, poly(ethylene glycol) diglycidal ether, and bis[polyoxyethylene bis(glycidyl ether)], and mixtures thereof.
- 21. The process according to any of claims 17 to 19 wherein said crosslinking agent is a multibasic acid having both a pKa₁ and a pKa₂ that are both less than about 5.5.

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- 22. The process according to claim 21 wherein said crosslinking agent is adipic acid, butane tetracarboxylic acid, citric acid, glutaric acid, itaconic acid, malic acid, succinic acid, or mixtures thereof.
- 23. The process according to claim 17 or 18 wherein said crosslinking agent comprises a metal ion selected from the group consisting of Cu²⁺, Fe³⁺, Ce³⁺, Ti⁴⁺, Zr⁴⁺, and Ce⁴⁺.
 - 24. The process according to claim 23 wherein said crosslinking agent is selected from the group consisting of CuSO₄, FeCl₃, Ce₂(SO₄)₃, ZrCl₄, Ce(NH₄)₄(SO₄)₄ $^{\circ}$ 2H₂O, and mixtures thereof.
 - 25. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein said chitosan salt is recovered by evaporative drying.
- 26. The process according to claim 25 wherein said evaporative drying is done at a temperature from about 10°C to about 100°C.
 - 27. The process according to any of claims 1 to 24 wherein said chitosan salt is recovered by precipitation.
 - 28. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein said mixture has an quilibrium pH betw en about 2.5 to about 6.

- 29. The process according to claim 28 wherein said mixture has an equilibrium pH between about 4 to about 6.
- 5 30. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 17 grams per gram.
- 10 31. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 20 grams per gram.
- 15 32. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt retains at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24°C and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.
- 33. The process according to any of the preceding claims wherein the water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt retains at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 20 days at about 24°C and at about 100 percent relative humidity.
 - 34. A water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt wherein the chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 14 grams per gram.
- 35. The chitosan salt of claim 34 wherein the chitosan salt is chitosan hydrochloride, chitosan hydrobromide, chitosan phosphate, chitosan formate, chitosan acetate, chitosan propionate, chitosan chloroacetate, chitosan hydroxyacetate, chitosan butyrate, chitosan isobutyrate, chitosan acrylate, or mixtures thereof.

- 36. The chit san salt of claim 35 wherein the chitosan salt is chitosan hydrochloride, chitosan formate, chitosan acetate, chitosan propionate or mixtures thereof.
- 5 37. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 36 wherein the chitosan salt has average degree of acetylation of from 0 to about 0.5.
- 38. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 37 wherein the chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 17 grams per gram.
 - 39. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 38 wherein the chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load value of at least about 20 grams per gram.

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- 40. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 39 wherein the chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load of at least about 24 grams per gram.
- 41. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 40 wherein the chitosan salt exhibits an initial Absorbency Under Load of at least about 27 grams per gram.
- 25 42. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 41 wherein th chitosan salt retains at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24°C and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.
 - 43. The chitosan salt of claim 42 wherein the chitosan salt retains at least about 70 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 60 days at about 24°C and at least about 30 percent relative humidity.
 - 44. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 43 wherein th chitosan salt retains at least about 50 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value aft r aging f r about 20

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days at about 24°C and at about 100 percent relative humidity.

45. The chitosan salt of claim 44 wherein the chitosan salt retains at least about 70 percent of the initial Absorbency Under Load value after aging for about 20 days at about 24°C and at about 100 percent relative humidity.

- 46. The chitosan salt of any of claims 34 to 45 wherein the chitosan salt has a viscosity in a 1.0 weight percent aqueous solution at 25°C of from about 100 mPa·s (100 centipoise) to about 80,000 mPa·s (80,000 centipoise).
- 47. A water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt obtainable by the process according to any of claims 1 to 33.

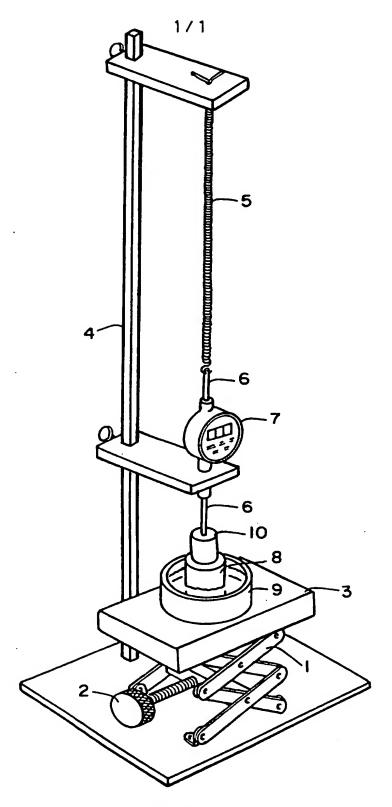


FIG. I

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INTERNATIONAL APPLICATION PUBLISHED UNDER THE PATENT COOPERATION TREATY (PCT)

(51) International Patent Classification 6:

(11) International Publication Number:

WO 96/20015

C08B 37/08, A61L 15/28

A3

(43) International Publication Date:

4 July 1996 (04.07.96)

(21) International Application Number:

PCT/US95/16191

(22) International Filing Date:

14 December 1995 (14.12.95)

(30) Priority Data: .

08/362,395

22 December 1994 (22.12.94) US

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(81) Designated States: AM, AT, AU, BB, BG, BR, BY, CA, CH, CN, CZ, DE, DK, EE, ES, FI, GB, GE, HU, IS, JP, KE, KG, KP, KR, KZ, LK, LR, LT, LU, LV, MD, MG, MN, MW, MX, NO, NZ, PL, PT, RO, RU, SD, SE, SG, SI, SK, TJ, TM, TT, UA, UG, UZ, VN, ARIPO patent (KE, LS, MW, SD, SZ, UG), European patent (AT, BE, CH, DE, DK, ES, FR, GB, GR, IE, IT, LU, MC, NL, PT, SE), OAPI patent (BF, BJ, CF, CG, CI, CM, GA, GN, ML, MR, NE, SN, TD, TG).

Published

With international search report.

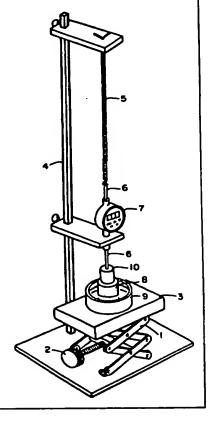
Before the expiration of the time limit for amending the claims and to be republished in the event of the receipt of amendments.

(88) Date of publication of the international search report: 6 September 1996 (06.09.96)

(\$4) Title: CHITOSAN SALTS AND PROCESS FOR THE PREPARATION THEREOF

(57) Abstract

Disclosed is a method for producing a water-swellable, water-insoluble chitosan salt having improved absorption properties. The method involves forming a mixture of a chitosan, water, an acid, and, optionally, a crosslinking agent, recovering the formed chitosan salt from the mixture and, optionally, treating said recovered chitosan salt with heat or under humid conditions.



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INTERNATIONAL SEARCH REPORT Inter onal Application No

		PCI/US_9	5/16191
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	SEARCHED		
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